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SUBJECT: Bashir Interview: AU Summit, Darfur, AIDS, Trade, and Oil

¶1. (U) Summary and comment: Post received an English copy of President Omer Al-Bashir's interview with Sudan News Agency Director General Mohamed Hatim Sulieman on the occasion of the convening of the 6th African Union Summit in Khartoum. Bashir responded to questions on a number of issues ranging from local to regional and international questions.

¶2. (SBU) In the carefully staged interview, President Bashir pushed some familiar themes: the foreign conspiracy to undermine Sudan, the government's lack of responsibility for Darfur, and the west's efforts to continually move the goal posts so that Sudan can never succeed. He also took the opportunity to push his campaign for AU chairmanship, with both the President and the reporter citing several instances where African leaders took charge of major organizations despite internal conflicts.

¶3. (U) The interview then moves on to development issues. While generally following the policies of the non-aligned movement, the President does say AIDS is less prevalent in countries that are "religiously and morally committed." The dialogue ends with an explanation of how U.S. oil companies had tried to deny Sudan its oil wealth by refusing to produce until America could better control and exploit Sudan. He concluded by saying it is fortune that south-south cooperation has led to Sudan being able to prosper from its resources. End summary and comment.

¶3. (U) The text of the interview is as follows:

(Begin text as received)

Question: Mr. President, Khartoum is now witnessing intensive activities aimed at preparing the ground for the sixth African Union summit conference, this was preceded by invitations for the African leaders as well as your visit to each of Nigeria and Libya and a number of African countries, do you expect a huge turnout for the summit?

President: In the name of Allah the Graceful the Dispenser of Grace, and Peace and Blessing of Allah be Upon His Prophet. Yes. In fact we expect a massive turnout for the African heads of state to this summit, we have dispatched delegations and envoys for this purpose and this would be the outcome.

Question: Mr. President do you expect this summit to be a successful one?

President: We think this will be an important summit that will be unique as regards the issues it would be

handling, in particular the questions related to culture and science which are very important parts of the discussions of the summit. It is here that we think that our continent is far behind. If we are talking about the African union we have to be aware of the size of the differences that exist between and inside the continent, which has become vulnerable to foreign cultures. Africa is divided between the French and the English speaking countries and thus we would like to have an organization that will lead to the creation of a body, the African Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization (AFESCO) that will lay the ground for unification.

Question: Could we Mr. President speak of Khartoum and Sudan working to see a successful summit, or is Khartoum working only to secure winning the chairmanship of the African Union?

President: For us the success of the summit comes first, preceding even the chairmanship of the AU. The essential issue is not the chairmanship but rather the success of the summit. This is our priority.

Question: The summit conference success?

President: Yes the success of the summit is our priority. For us this is a very important issue and it would lead to the solution of many a question in the continent and problem that the continent faces.

Question: Mr. President your government has scored many successes in the petroleum exploration and in the political domains it has achieved peace but up to now it has not achieved a breakthrough in the question of Darfur, your comment?

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President: Yes this is one of the major questions. In fact most of our problems are not internal alone. The foreign element is prominent here. There is no doubt that peace could be achieved between two parties however it is clear that the other party or other parties are not keen to achieve peace. Just look at the tremendous efforts we have exerted in the negotiation and the efforts exerted for the unification of those factions, factions with specific demands and with specific policies, efforts exerted in Italy and those exerted in many other places, but it is clear those movements are not qualified to unite their ranks

Question: Mr. President, Kenya has handled the peace file between the Sudanese government and the Sudan people liberation Movement SPLM well after it was no longer heading the IGAD, so by analogy do you think the Darfur file would be removed from the hands of President Obassanjo in case the Sudan assumes the chairmanship of the African Union?

President: We have made it clear that the file would not be removed from the hand of president Obassanjo of Nigeria as mediator because any change in the file would mean beginning from scratch. So at least Nigeria and president Obassanjo have become familiar with the file, with the negotiations and all other activities surrounding the question of Darfur, be it within the AU or in the Peace and Security Council or during the five member summit or even in the bilateral encounters, thus Nigeria is the best lieu for.

Question: Handling the file?

President: Yes for handling the file.

Question: Mr. President on the international level we have been following the question of the International

Criminal Court ICC and also the report of the Human Rights Watch groups on alleged human rights violation in Darfur and on the regional level the year 2005 witnessed the signing of the CPA in Sudan that was considered a good omen for Africa. On the other hand we have seen the election of a president for Togo and a Hutu leader was elected President for Burundi and Mrs. Ben Johnson was also elected as the first African lady to become President. But this same year has seen a renewal of the Ethiopian over Badamy triangle and then by the end of the year we witnessed a scuffle between Sudan and Chad and the campaign led for foiling the convening of fire sixth summit conference in the Sudan and the chairmanship of the AU added to this the recent statements by Koffi Annan. So Mr. President, how do you see all these evens while we are approaching the convening of the summit conference in Khartoum?

President: Of course there was an influential and big power that had been opposing the convening of the summit in Khartoum and as the convening of the summit was a decision to be taken by the heads of state in the African continent thus it became difficult for them to cancel the convening of the summit in Khartoum. So they did their best that the AU would not nominate or elect the Sudan for the chairmanship of the African Union for the coming year. All this is to be seen within the context of the plotting against Sudan. We have noticed that whenever we score a success in one area the activities of the hostile quarters would be intensified for creating other problems that would affect the Sudan. This was clear that the moment we were about to sign the peace protocols in Naivasha, the question of Darfur was escalated and was brought to the attention of the Security Council despite the fact that the war in southern Sudan continued for twenty years, the longest war in the continent and the most destructive war in therein, still the issue was never brought to the attention of the security council but the success we secured was not expected by elements opposing the peace in southern Sudan and we are now sure that they are hiding waiting if the peace deal works in Darfur then they would fan the question of Eastern Sudan and the report of the Human Rights Watch is never a surprise to us nor was the report of Amnesty International nor that which was filed by Christian of Baronet Cox. Those are all quarters that have been declaring war against the Sudan and are coming up with allegations about all these human rights violation and about the genocide and about the ethnic cleansing and mass rape and now they are coming up with the lie of the

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forceful kidnapping and all these are not new to us and they in fact are no longer bothering us, we have lived with them for the last 16 years.

Question: This is despite the fact that the question of the Niger Delta had not prevented Nigeria from heading the Union likewise the question between Ethiopia and Eritrea did not prevent Ethiopia from heading the AU?

President: In fact Kenya, which since 1993 was heading IGAD when the initiative was launched, and its chairmanship for IGAD changed and we were heading that organization for two session but still Kenya continued to handle the Sudanese peace file. The same with Somalia when Kenya was handling that file, it continued.

Question: And it now heads the session for the African Peace and Security Council?

President: Yes, we could not link the two issues, but the file of Darfur will remain in the hands of President Obassajo, God willing.

Question: Mr. President since the formation of the

Organization of African Unity in 1963 and its conversion into the African Union in June 11 2002, the continent witnessed some 126 coups and 24 wars and disunity is facing a number of African countries, so how can the African unity be realized and is the African union a copy of the European union or is it a real crystallization of the political, economic and cultural unity under the umbrella of the African diversity?

President: Our view of the African problem is that most of them are internal problems inside the countries, this is because of the reasons that the countries in Africa were not formed in the natural way, the colonization drew the borderlines and amassed inside the boundaries of one and each state contradictions and the existence of these contradictions led to the creation of a conducive climate for time bombs that could go off and as there are so much of interest in Africa, Africa being the virgin land with its un tapped natural resources and the fact that Africa has huge raw material needed for the western industries and if we look at the aphidian map and the map of the problems the continent is suffering from them we would come with the conclusion that the two are identical. That the countries with huge potentials in the lake area we will find Congo and Angola and we will find Sudan.

Question: The presence petroleum and diamonds?

President: Wherever there is gold, oil and diamond then you have problems and people who want to keep Africa poor and ignorant and a source of raw material they are the countries that are behind the problems in Africa. Thus the African unity is our only hope to get out of those problems. If you look at Asia we find that it has already moved forwards, Europe and America the same, then what rest is Africa which is underdeveloped and most of the developing countries are found in Africa.

Question: Then what are the vision and the objectives of the current summit conference of the African Union in Khartoum?

President: The first objective is to reinforce the African Unity and to bring closer its members and also as I have said earlier one of the objectives is to established AFESCO, which would be a vital element in the African unity.

Question: But do we have that strong political commitment to achieve all those objectives?

President: Yes we think the political will is there but of course there are other elements which are outside the continue and their influence is felt inside the continent. However efforts are being exerted to bring the African closer and to contribute in resolving the pending question among the countries of the continent. I believe that this would pave the way for moving forwards and we expect the birth of the African unity in a very short time if we look into the case of the European union since its establishment and that it has now reached the stage of a unified monetary unit.

Question: Mr. President the convening of the summit coincide with the 50th anniversary of Sudan's

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independence, what is the significance of linking the two events and what is the Sudanese contribution for the African continent in fifty years and what has Africa given to the Sudan?

President: The independence of the Sudan is no doubt one of the major events in the continent, Sudan being one of the first African countries to gain independence, well before the establishment of the organization of the

African unity and Sudan played a major role in backing the African liberation movements and many of the movements began their activities from inside the Sudan. I personally met President Nelson Mandela and the former President of Namibia Sam Ngoma who all stressed that they moved out of southern Africa to Sudan and Khartoum because it was the capital that had gained its independence and that they found support and each of them was holding a Sudanese passport and also Sudan provided assistance to those movements in the diplomatic and political domains. Sudan is also a founding member of the organization of African unity OAU. Sudan is also a founding member of the non-aligned movement. So Sudan provided assistance to the African liberation movements be it directly or indirectly via the regional and international organizations. We also provided assistance to many of the sons of the African continent and we have provided training and education to over five thousand African student in the African international university in Khartoum and other universities in the country. We also provide experts for Africa and Sudanese experts have contributed in so many projects in the African continent, Sudanese experts established the railways in Zambia and in Tanzania.

Question: And what has Africa provided for the Sudan?

President: In actual fact we have found every possible assistance from Africa and Africa stood by our side. It suffices to cite the peace that has been achieved in southern Sudan. This peace was achieved as a result of the IGAD initiative, which was directly supported by the African Unity.

Question: Mr. President for the percent 45% of the population in Africa have an income of less than one us dollar a day and an African child dies in every five second in Africa, how can Africa face this question of poverty?

President: This is a serious challenge for the continent in general, the poverty, the famine and the diseases that affect African in the north and in the south and in the west such as malaria and other fatal disease such as AIDS and the spread of illiteracy all these are some of the real challenges that face the continent. But the main cause behind all those problems is the instability inside those countries and between these countries. So if we can achieve stability in the continent and if we can achieve peace and stability inside the countries of the continent then we would create the conducive atmosphere for an economic development, a corner stone in resolution of all those problems.

Question: Mr. President, you said AIDS registered 3,2 million new cases in Africa, while 60% of world AIDS cases, around 40 million people, are in Africa. You have also mentioned that the infection rate in some African countries amounted to 40% among their citizens. As African Leaders how can you face this lethal disease, which threatens the continent?

President: As I said the issue of AIDS tops the agenda of the summit as with how to face it and how to utilize the experiences of other countries to roll it back. If we look into the AIDS belt in Africa, we find that the less infected countries are the countries, which are religiously and morally committed, while some of such countries are even AIDS free.

Question: But Mr. President, the disease did spread?

President: AIDS outbreak does constitute a serious issue, for if 40% of the population are infected, this means that they pose a threat for the non-infected ones, particularly through extramarital relations. Such a matter is probable, a matter, which necessitates an intensive media campaign to inform the people with the

danger of the disease as well as advanced diagnostic mean and then how to deal with the infected ones. Of course

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we do not call for discriminating the AIDS infected people, but we call for dealing with them in a positive way, which insures that the disease would not be transmitted through them to non-infected people, particularly the children who have nothing to do with this matter. Another matter is the existing medicines. Are they effective or their effectiveness is questioned, thou they are expensive? Of course we believe that the concerned bodies could be processing inexpensive drugs to save the infected people.

Question: Mr. President, in the recent Hong Kong conference, the rich countries refused to subsidies from their agricultural products, a matter, which greatly disappointed the African States, which depend on the agricultural products of those rich countries. How can Africa tackle this problem?

President: This reflects the size of the international hypocrisy. When the World Trade Organization was established, of course it was established by the rich countries, which believed that, through the organization, they can control the world trade. However, they discovered that a great number of the citizens, in many countries, are involved in agriculture, while they are industrial countries. In America, for instance, agriculture does not exceed 4% of the US economic activity, yet the majority of the American people work in agriculture, and therefore, lifting the support from agriculture in these countries will have a great negative effect on them at the internal level, the reason why they became hesitant in lifting such a support. This indicates that they may even never fulfill their commitments, save for after long times, a matter, which would constitute a blow for the developing countries whose economies relay on agriculture.

Question: On agriculture?

President: I mean the agricultural countries whose products are raw. Actually, the refusal to lift the agricultural subsidies constitutes a blow for all the producers. Definitely, the countries that depend mainly on the agricultural activity, while the income of the country is from taxes on the agricultural activity, therefore, when agriculture is a particular country is supported by the state, this country resorts to imposing taxes on agriculture to be able to manage to steer its activities.

Question: Then this means there is no competition at the international market?

President: Of course we can enter these markets, but it would be with very low prices for our raw exports. At the same time, we import these same raw materials, after they are processed, with double their prices. For instance, we produce cotton, but we import the turban, so think at what price do we sell cotton and how much do we pay to buy the turban?

Question: A big contradiction?

President: Big contradiction.

Question: Mr. President, concerning trade, we find that the size of the African trade has dropped from 6% of the total world trade in 1980 to 2,2% in 2004. How do you view the situation within the challenges of the coming world trade?

President: Many of the problems, such as drought, which

hit many of the African countries, have definitely affected productivity, and consequently exports. Non-introduction of modern agricultural technologies also contributed to the decrease in the production rates. Many countries, which used to import great amounts of commodities, such as rice, have now started to achieve high production rates after introducing modern agricultural technologies. Therefore, we, in Africa, need to introduce these modern technologies. However, the introduction of these technologies needs great potentialities that Africa lacks, the reason why international organizations, such as FAO and others, provide assistance for the African states, and because food production itself became a problem in Africa, as we watch famines and their destructive impact on the satellite channels.

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Question: Referring to what you said about petroleum, the U.S. Vice President mentioned in 2001 that Africa was the source of American energy, while the US Assistant Secretary of State also mentioned, in 2001, that the

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African petroleum has become of a strategic interest. Additionally, the CIA report also indicated that America would get a quarter of its oil imports from Africa. How do you view this American concern with the African file?

President: Definitely, there would be positive sides if America, with its companies, invested in petroleum in Africa, but the Americans try to control oil sources, a matter which poses a threat. True that America obtains 25% of its oil needs from Africa, and presently there is a petroleum belt that extends from Sudan to Equatorial Guinea. All these areas are oil rich. Of course people produce oil to sell, but the attempts of monopoly is what poses a threat against these oil rich countries. We have an experience with America in this respect, for they came, explored and discovered the petroleum and specified its areas and reserves, but they delayed its utilization.

Question: Why did they delay utilization of the Sudanese oil after they discovered it?

President: They left with the hope to come back according to their plans and programs, but thanks to God Almighty, for we have managed to explore and extract our petroleum with the support of our friends, so we present our experience as a model for the south-south cooperation. People used to say that western countries should come if we are to extract our petroleum, but we did that with the support of the Chinese, Malaysian, Indian and Pakistani experiences. Thanks to Allah, the God Almighty.

(End text)

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